

SUBJECT: Requiring even distribution of SNAP benefits throughout the month

COMMITTEE: Human Services — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Frank, Hinojosa, Clardy, Deshotel, Klick, Meza, Miller, Noble, Rose
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Celia Cole, Feeding Texas; Dya Campos, H-E-B; George Kelemen, Texas Retailers Association; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Mia McCord, Texas Conservative Coalition; Morris Wilkes, United Supermarkets)
Against — None
On — Rachel Cooper, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Todd Byrnes, Health and Human Services Commission

BACKGROUND: Human Resources Code sec. 33.002(c) requires the Department of Agriculture and the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission to establish policies to ensure the widest and most efficient distribution of supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits to eligible recipients.

DIGEST: HB 1218 would require the executive commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission to establish a distribution schedule for supplemental nutrition assistance programs (SNAP) that ensured the even distribution of the benefits each month over a 28-day period. The executive commissioner would be required to make any necessary rule changes to implement the bill by September 1, 2020.

The bill would apply to newly eligible SNAP recipients as of September 1, 2020, and would not affect the distribution schedules of current recipients.

If the state agency determined that a waiver or authorization from a federal agency was necessary to implement a provision the bill, it could delay implementation of that provision until the waiver or authorization was granted.

HB 1218 would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1218 would improve the shopping experience for customers and allow retailers to better predict staffing requirements to meet demand by requiring the distribution of SNAP benefits over a 28-day period.

Under the current system, HHSC distributes all SNAP benefits within the first half of the month, causing stores to be busier at the beginning of the month and run out of perishables by the end of the month. Providing a more even distribution through each benefit period would mean SNAP recipients would be less likely to face long lines at the grocery store early in the month and all customers would be less likely to face shortages later in the month.

Retailers have to employ more part-time staff to handle the increased demand during the first half of the month and have difficulty keeping shelves stocked with fresh produce and perishable food items. The bill would ease inventory logistics for grocery stores and allow them to hire more full-time staff.

Recent changes in the HHSC computer system would allow the agency to implement the bill while ensuring compliance with federal law that requires no more than 40 days elapse between any two consecutive monthly SNAP distributions.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No concerns identified.